

Visions Dreams and Hallucinations

J. M. White

**VISIONS, DREAMS AND
HALLUCINATIONS**



Photo Credit: JMW

A painting by Taos Pueblo artist Bernadette Track

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HALLUCINATIONS

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“the eye altered alters all” William Blake

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CHAPTER 1

VISIONARY ENCOUNTERS



Photo Credit: JMW
Spiral petroglyph in Hopi Arizona

we drove to Evansville Illinois
to see a psychic reader
we got to her place in the early evening
Katherine was an older woman with pure white hair
and a light airy voice that rose at the end of her sentences
we sat facing each other with our knees almost touching
she closed her eyes and talked about me
she said she saw a fire with the smoke rising high in the sky
and that signified a long life
when it was over we sat around her table talking
Katherine's dinner arrived but she ignored it as it grew cold
as I sat facing her she had a large glass vase on the table
it held about two dozen red plastic roses in various stages of openness
some were just buds and others were fully open
beside them sat a chrysanthemum growing in a small pot
it had a beautiful white flower crowning the top of the plant
the roses seemed garish and artificial next to the chrysanthemum
as I was looking at the flowers Katherine began telling me a story
how she received the plastic roses from a friend
as a Mother's Day gift many years before
she said they were all little rose buds when she received them
and she put them in a small vase
and placed the vase in the middle of the table
as time passed the little rose buds began to open
until they eventually outgrew their vase
and she transferred them to the vase they now occupy
a professor from the local university heard about the flowers
he makes monthly visits to measure their growth
and says the stems are getting thicker and longer
and the petals opening and getting larger
as she told the story my gaze shifted from Katherine to the roses
now they were transformed
they were no longer garish and artificial looking
now they appeared real
more than real

the petals looked soft and velvety with a glowing luminosity
they were intensely beautiful
the roses totally eclipsed the chrysanthemum
they had vibrant beauty
I stood up and reached out to touch one of the petals
as I stood Katherine directed a question to me
I looked at her and sat back down and answered
when I looked back
the roses had returned to the red plastic of before



Photo Credit: JMW

during a visit to see the Paleolithic cave art of Lascaux
the ancient walls of the cave are like a warehouse where time is stored
the cave has a dream-like quality
it feels alive with mythic energy
beyond the range of normal experience
it captures something inherent in the human spirit
something that reaches into the shared spirit of the earth
we were filled with a dizzying revelation of the mystery of being
it had a haunting illumination unbound by time or mental categories
we felt a wild excitement
in the presence of these magnificent images.
horses and deer are everywhere painted on the ceiling and walls
there is a bull that is eighteen feet long from nose to tail
the images are in all sizes some only a few inches tall
there are extinct deer called Megaloceros with huge antlers
the images are an ancient bestiary
integrated into the shape of the walls
so the animals become three-dimensional
the shapes of their bodies enhanced by the contours of the walls
wherever you look there is more to see than your eye can take in
the calcite on the walls has a crystalline twinkle
like starlight varnishing the air
this art is more dramatic than any present-day museum or art gallery
being here conveys the sublime consolation of art
it has a natural candor and a dream-like improbability
that reaches across time and space
it feels like a mineshaft into a different dimension
the art is a projection of a mythic imagination
too powerful too deliberate to be ignored
the art has a deep melodious insight
into something buried in the pre-conscious
it is a mirror which reflects a different time and a different place
it is a mighty draught

that leaves us dazzled with an anguished curiosity
and sensual wonder
as if time is concentrated here
distilled and fermented in this underground cauldron
it is a mystery play for which we are uninitiated



Photo Credit JMW
From a mural on display in the Vézère Valley, France.

I was in the house of a friend
and to my complete surprise there is Jack Kerouac
sitting in a big armchair in the living room
he appeared to be in his late forties
big and sort of bloated looking
wearing jeans and a flannel work shirt
obviously drunk on his ass
barely able to sit in the chair
there was a small pile of papers on the floor beside him
I went over to him and wanted to talk
I told him I had read every book he had written
and that I really liked the way he wrote
he looked at me like I had stabbed him with a knife
he cringed and withdrew with a pained shyness
I went over to my friend who owned the house
I thought here is Kerouac
maybe I can visit sometime when he might feel more like talking
then I had the terrible realization
Kerouac was long dead
I knew that
there was no way I could go to his house
with that I knew that I was dreaming
the whole thing was a dream
I looked back at Kerouac
he was totally passed out in the chair
he had picked up the pile of papers and had them in his hand
I awoke with a deep sense of sadness
a feeling that I had had something unobtainable
a few minutes with Jack Kerouac
and now they were gone
like a wisp of smoke
there only for the instant that it appears

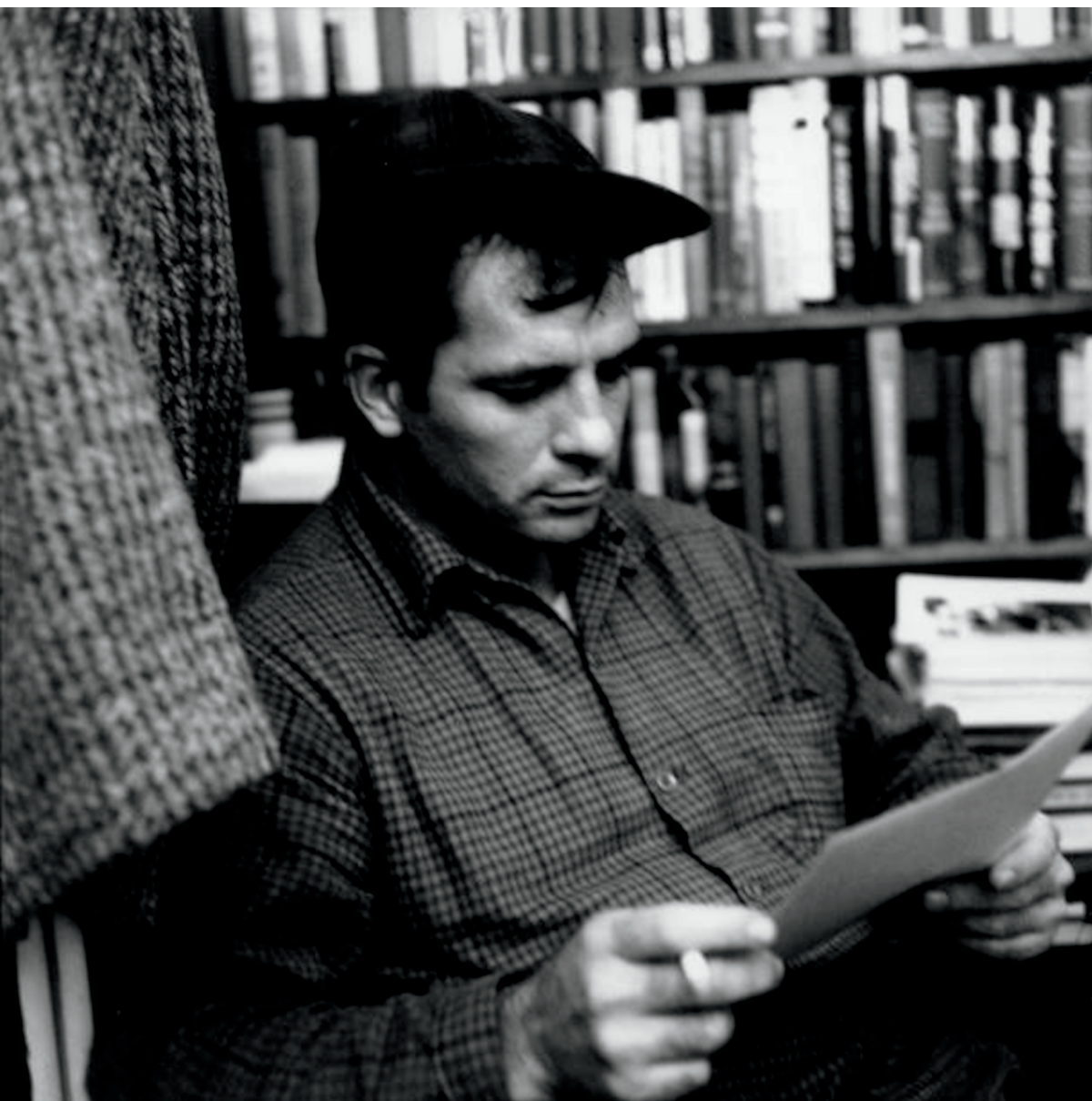


Photo Credit: Fred McDarrah
(*The Beat Scene*, Photographs by Fred McDarrah, Corinth Book, NYC, 1960)

sitting around a table with Brother Paul Quenon
in Thomas Merton's cabin at the Abbey of Gethsemani
I ask Brother Paul to tell me his most visionary experience
and he starts right in
he says when he was ten years old his father was dying
no one in the family would tell him
but he knew something was going on
and felt a need to go to church and pray
he knelt in the front pew and started praying
then he had the feeling he should lay down
but didn't think it appropriate to lay down in the church
so he went outside and lay in the grass
the next thing he knew he was walking alongside another boy his age
it was snowing
and he was leaving tracks in the snow
but the boy beside him wasn't leaving any tracks
then they walked up to a fence
and the boy told him
"Your father is dying"
Brother Paul was concerned and asked him about heaven
and the boy told him, "Heaven is everywhere"
Brother Paul went up to the fence
and suddenly found himself on the other side
then woke up in the grass outside the church
when he told his mother about the experience
she told him, "It is only a dream"
he told her that he knew what dreams were
and this was not a dream
he took it as a message
that while death seems to be an obstacle you can't get around
it isn't what it appears to be
and assured him he could get through it



Photo Credit: JMW
Thomas Merton's cabin at the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky



Photo Credit: JMW
Bro. Paul keeping the fire alive.

one summer day in 1977
we rounded up a carload of people
and headed to a party at Trader Pete's
there was a bonfire in the yard
and a band playing in the living room
people were drinking and smoking weed
and the people I came with were all tripping on LSD
my friend had a big library in his house
and that's where I liked to hang out
he had a life-size engraving of Goethe's head
framed over his mantle
deep into the night I had been standing by the fire
and when I came back into the library
I immediately noticed that Goethe's head was different
now it was like a bust carved from stone
sitting in a niche over the fireplace
I blinked and looked away
but when I looked back it still looked totally three-dimensional
so I went and got one of my friends who was tripping
and told him to come in the library with me
when we went in the library he immediately noticed Goethe's head
without me saying anything about it
we looked at each other and smiled
we had one more friend who was tripping
so we found him and told him to come in the library
but when he went in the room
he took one look over the mantle
got a wild look in his eye
and went running out of the room

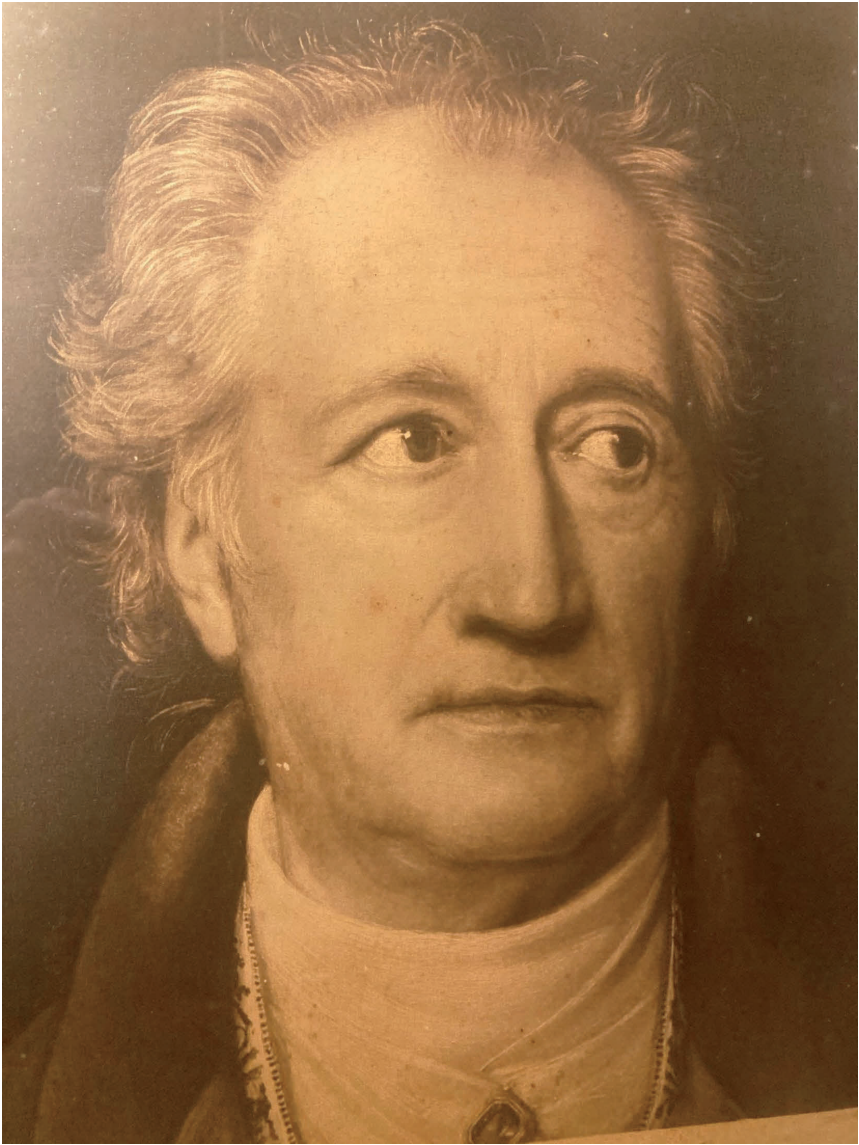


Photo Credit: Peter Broderson
From the engraving of Goethe's head that hangs over his mantle

sitting around a small table talking to William S. Burroughs
I ask him
“Have you ever had an out-of-body experience?”
“Oh yes, of course, it happens all the time”
that surprises me since it doesn’t seem to happen to me all the time
so I ask
“Other than in the dream state?”
“Oh yes, you have it all the time, where were you yesterday at this time?”
I look across the table at him
shift my eyes to the blank wall behind him
my concentration shifts to an inner mind search back into my memory
I feel almost dizzy as my mind sorts back through the immediate past
then bang
it stops and there I am in another apartment
this one dimly lit
Philip Whalen sitting shaven head enrobed in black and white Zen robes
a string of beads around his wrist
his gentle voice pervading the atmosphere
then I focus back on Burroughs
all this taking so little time there is no break in the conversation as I reply
“Uh, with Philip Whalen”
“Ok, when I said that you put yourself back there”
“Yes, that's right, I was there, I saw it”
I'm amazed
Burroughs goes on
“Well of course it happened”
I don't follow the rest of his sentence as I start to laugh
as I realize that I was out of my body
I was there for that instant back in that room with Philip Whalen
I experienced a different time and place
Burroughs goes on speaking
“It's just a matter of intensity “
“Do you relate that to astral travel?”
“Yes this is astral travel, it is the same thing”



Photo Credit: Stone Alovus,
JMW and William S. Burroughs, at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied
Poetics, 1982

when I was working with a local Native American group
I got to know one of the field workers
who was a member of the Native American Church
I was visiting at his home when he had one of his wives
bring out a big cardboard box
and put it on the coffee table in the living room
we all gathered around and he opened the lid
and it was full of row upon row of fresh peyote buttons
I looked in the box
and it was as if it was vibrating at a different frequency
it let off an energy that was almost visible
he let me pick three of the buttons
I took them home and dried them and pulled the thistles off
and ate them one night
I was up all night
I was expecting to throw up or have an upset stomach
but it never happened
instead I roamed around the woods with a Coleman lantern
I sat down by a creek and watched the water flow
there were delicate light green weeds growing by the creek
they were *Impatiens capensis*
which the locals called Jewelweeds or Touch-Me-Nots
since they produce a delicate orange flower
that grows into a ribbed seed pod that explodes if you touch it
broadcasting the seeds in a wide area around the plant
the plants filled the little area where I was sitting
in the lamplight the stems of the plants were luminescent
glowing with a translucent vibrant green
I could see the life of the plant streaming up and down in the stalk
I was sitting in a circle of lamplight
that felt like a bubble of light around me
when a fox stuck his head into the bubble
and disappeared just as quickly back into the darkness
it was a memorable night



Photo Credit: JMW

I was having some vision issues
and went to the eye doctor
after the usual exam with the equipment
he had me cover one eye
and held a bright light up next to my other eye
the light was less than an inch from my eyeball
all I could see was this immense white light shining in my eye
and then all at once the whole field of vision changed
the light was entirely gone
and suddenly my entire visual field was filled with red
and I realized I was seeing the back of my eyeball
as if it were projected outward onto my visual screen
it was reddish colored and looked like skin only softer
and there were blood vessels running across it
like great rivers that branched and flowed in distinct veins
when he moved the light
I watched the whole scenario move in front of me
like I was flying high above an otherworldly terrain
that I knew was part of my body I had never seen before
this inner eye vision fascinated me
and I was disappointed when he pulled the light away
and announced there were no abnormalities in my retina
years later I was reading about the physiology of the eye
and learned the cells that transmit vision
are several layers deep in the cell structure of the back of the eye
and I knew that somehow my eye had focused all the way down
to where I could see the surface of the back of the eye
in a visionary experience brought on by a light in my eye

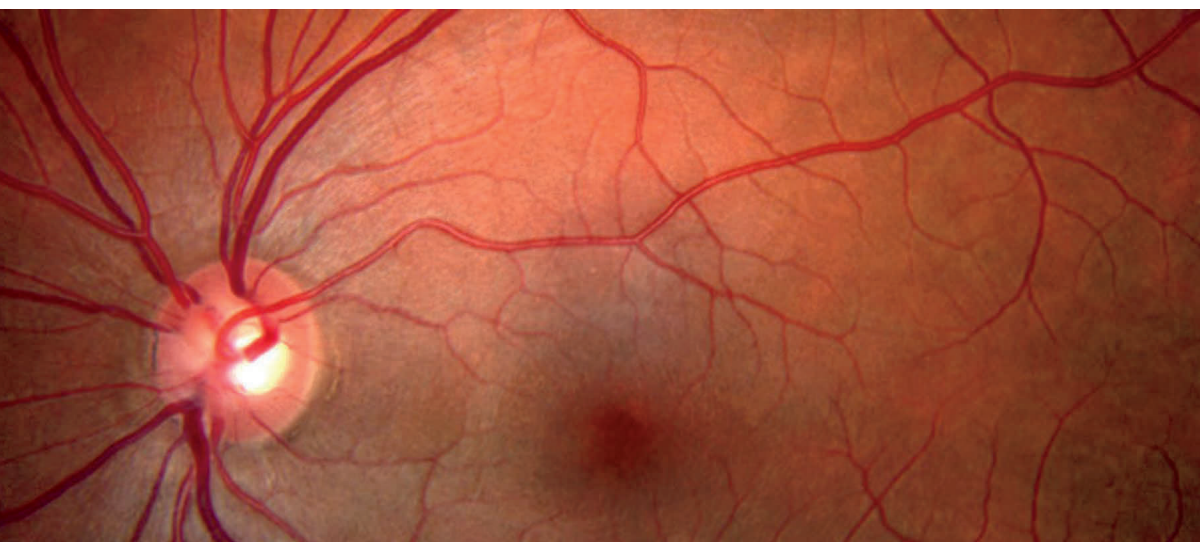


Photo Credit: Inner Eye Stock Photos

sitting with Lenny at the gallery
I ask him if he ever had any visionary experiences
and he started right in
telling about being at Georgia O'Keefe's house at Abiquiu
it is a gorgeous house with a magnificent view
it has an inner courtyard
that is the subject of many of her famous paintings
Lenny was in the courtyard
admiring a giant sunflower that was drying on a wooden platform
he had his camera
when he noticed out of the corner of his eye
a small female figure clad in black
with a hood or scarf over her head
walking across the courtyard
he turned quickly to see who it was
but she was gone
he looked where she had been
no one was there



Photo Credit: Lenny Foster
The entrance to the courtyard at Georgia O'Keefe's house

I ask my friend Joy about any altered experience
and she sent me this story
“I remember my beginnings of New York
it was me and fat Suzy
artist model extraordinaire
she was coming into town looking to lay eyes on a fag for the first time
hearing ‘Fuck me little girl’, from a foreigners' lips was simply exotic
Mommy and Daddy were safe at home
getting along awfully well with God
this kinda put my mind at rest to go about my own business
so it’s off with our clothes
Fat Suzy and me
Suzy made a wrong turn out of the dressing room
and ended up on the fire escape
naked except for a straw hat and stiletto heels
then one night I get a call from this RD Laing bisexual schizophrenic
he says, ‘I’m not too welcome at the ole watering hole’
I ask a sweet foolish why
and he tells me this bedtime story
‘I blew some coke and got drunk
and punched Candy Darling in the teeth
then this lawyer fella
a friend of Big Mama
comes over and asks me why I did it
I answer like a gentleman
I say, ‘First of all he was bigger than me
and second how would you like your balls pasted to your chin?’
did you hear that
Candy Darling is a he not a she
but before he hangs up he give me a valuable bit of advice
that I don't know how I got by without knowing
‘You can always tell a witch by the tip of his dick’ he says wisely
‘It’s always cold’

then smirking at his insanity
and loving him for it
I answer this beautiful creature
'Listen to me, romancing madness is trouble.'
it's twelve o'clock when I hang up
and make a mature decision to keep my hands to myself
and stay away from witches and warlocks
I go to sleep and say my prayers
'Now I lay me...God bless Fat Suzy and me.'
I fell off dreaming of a pink elephant and me in the kitchen
homey
riding the range''



Photo Credit: JMW,
Sculpture by Enzo Torcoletti

sitting in the back of a classroom listening to Gary Snyder
he finishes his lecture and opens the class to questions
he sits smiling waiting patiently
someone asks
“Could you talk about the Native American practice called
catching a song,
have you ever caught a song?”
Gary told how the Indians would go on long walks
back into the mountains
where they would camp by a waterfall and wait till they heard a song
they might hear it in the sound of the waterfall
or an animal might give it to them
if the time wasn't right they would hear only the music
if they were successful they would sing the song for the tribe
and the elders would comment on it
great songs were passed down over many generations
then he remarked that he had caught a song
he said he was working on a road crew
during a time when he was very concerned about pollution
and was feeling very negative about the future of the world
during his lunch one day he went off to be by himself
and sat on a pile of stones
looking at the snowcapped mountains in the distance
when a magpie flew down and landed on a branch in front of him
the magpie looked at him and sang a song
he heard the words plain and clear
he asked if anyone had a copy of *Turtle Island*
someone in the front row handed him a copy
he opened it to the “Magpie Song” and sang in a soft but clear voice

Here in the mind, brother
Turquoise blue.
I wouldn't fool you.
Smell the breeze
It came through all the trees
No need to fear
What's ahead
Snow up on the mountains west
Will be there every year
be at rest.
A feather on the ground
the wind sound- -



Photo Credit: JMW

Gary Snyder at Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

I asked my friend Lamont if he had a story for me
he sent me a tale about when he was a boy in Nashville in 1962
“I was somewhere in that floating zone between 12 and 13
carried by unseen currents across that unknown gulf
between childhood and the far country where the adults lived
late one summer night I was camped out on a cot in the back yard
regarding the mysteries of the star-swarmed sky
where ten thousand multi-hued fires burned in a cold and perfect vacuum
millennia ago the paths of the fixed stars and Wanderers had been mapped
by Chaldean and Egyptian and Mayan priests
who created scrolls and books of alignments and predictions
that could only be used by advisers to the rulers of the kingdoms
the astrologer-priests and the kings they served had become dust
long before my night under the stars
now the stars and wandering planets were marked and timed
and flattened within horoscope columns in the local newspaper
I had memorized the constellations
and watched the sky through my small telescope
I could discern the modest patch of silver-gray luminosity
of the Andromeda Galaxy
I lay under the deep calm of the night sky watching for meteors
or the infrequent satellites moving steadily among the stars
this particular night was clear and still
I gazed into the stars for an hour or more
focusing unfocusing
letting the connecting lines of the constellations fall away
beholding the night-sky and its vibrating specks of jewel-light
nameless and unbounded
the stars became living swarms of light
bright motes moving across the endless sea of darkness
dancing in time telling their unending and timeless stories
then all at once I was floating
suspended in that deep and silent space that held the stars
I sensed these luminous spheres had an all-pervasive consciousness
and felt the presence of a great loving force

and an overwhelming feeling of peace
the sensation was familiar yet unfathomable
the light lifted me into the space between the stars
guided me among the orbs
for a time-without time I floated in this pearlescent light
then with no sense of movement
I was in my backyard bed
awake and longing for that light binding the stars”



Photo Credit: NASA

passing joints and drinking wine with Ken Kesey
I ask him to tell me an acid tale
he starts in without a second's pause
I had taken a bunch of acid
we were driving through snowbanks on the way to Crater Lake
the snowbanks were piled up on both sides of the road
all in white
we were breathing gas too
we scooted from side to side in this big tube of snow
we finally found a place to pullover
and, oh the acid was just coming on good
all of a sudden someone spoke to me
I sat up and turned completely around
left everybody and went into the lotus position
which I can't go into at all and I never even try
and everything that was to be in my life was flipped by in front of me
a lot of it came in symbols
like swords in a pot or hands clasped
the images were coming really quick
it lasted maybe thirty seconds
when one of these things happens I remember it
I felt tremendously fortunate for having a real gift
I realized that the symbols represent junctures of my life
it was a gift given to me
I didn't make it up
it was like when you see stuff with that twist of illumination
like an old Bible
it reaches out and touches you
you know that it is real
nothing has ever come to say that the symbols were out of line
they were all positive and glorious things
a lot of them hard and warlike
but the whole thing was very positive
that's not true of all my acid experiences



Photo Credit: JMW

Zora Neale Hurston was sent to Haiti by Frank Boas
to make an anthropological study of voodoo
one evening while visiting with a friend
a local medicine man known as a houngan was present
when dusk commenced a cacophony of frogs
filled the air with their croaking
her host commented he had seen the houngan
make the frogs hush their noise
Zora expressed her incredulity
which became a challenge for the houngan
who stood up
turned his face toward the mountain peak
now shrouded in darkness
made a quick motion with one hand
and inhaled deeply from the waist up
he held this pose for a long moment
then relaxed
as he did the frogs all stopped in unison
he sat down and resumed their conversation saying
“They will not sing again until I permit them”
after he left when he went through the gate to the yard
all the frogs resumed in a resounding rebound



Photo Credit: Getty Images.

it was a cold winter night
I had discovered a recording of Neal Cassady
the spark plug of the Beat generation
it was when the Grateful Dead were doing an Acid Test
and Cassady was on stage rapping
I transcribed the monolog
it was delightful to hear his voice
and catch his words
a fast literary stream of consciousness
making wild associative leaps
saying things like
“no left turn unstoned”
it was fun and interesting
the next night I decided to try an experiment
I took every third word in the transcript
and wrote them down
it came out mostly gobbledygook
and then the words
“finally was suicide sign me a don’t”
it gave me the shivers
and reminded me of Neal’s death from hypothermia
out on some lonely railroad track in Mexico
I took it as a last cautionary tale from Neal



Photo Credit: Getty Images

Amonceta Sequoyah was an herbal healer
in the Eastern Band of the Cherokee
in their traditional homeland in the Smoky Mountains
he was over eighty when I got to meet him about 1978
I asked him to tell me a story about someone that he treated
and he started in about how two people came to him
with the same illness
he went out in the mountains
to gather the herbs to treat the disease
he walked for a while deep into the forest
then he spotted one of the herbs that he was looking for
he told me he passed it by
because he always left the first one he found
to show the plants he wasn't greedy
and would never take more than what he needed
in a few minutes he started seeing more of the herb
and after a little bit
he had gathered enough to treat the first client
after that he began to look for enough to treat the second patient
but when he saw another of the plants
as he bent down to pick it
it withered in front of his eyes
he said the leaves shrank up like they were frostbit
then he saw another one nearby
and when he went to pick it the same thing happened
it withered up right in front of his eyes
he said he knew right then
that the first patient was going to recover
but that there was no point in treating the second man
and sure enough the second man died later that day

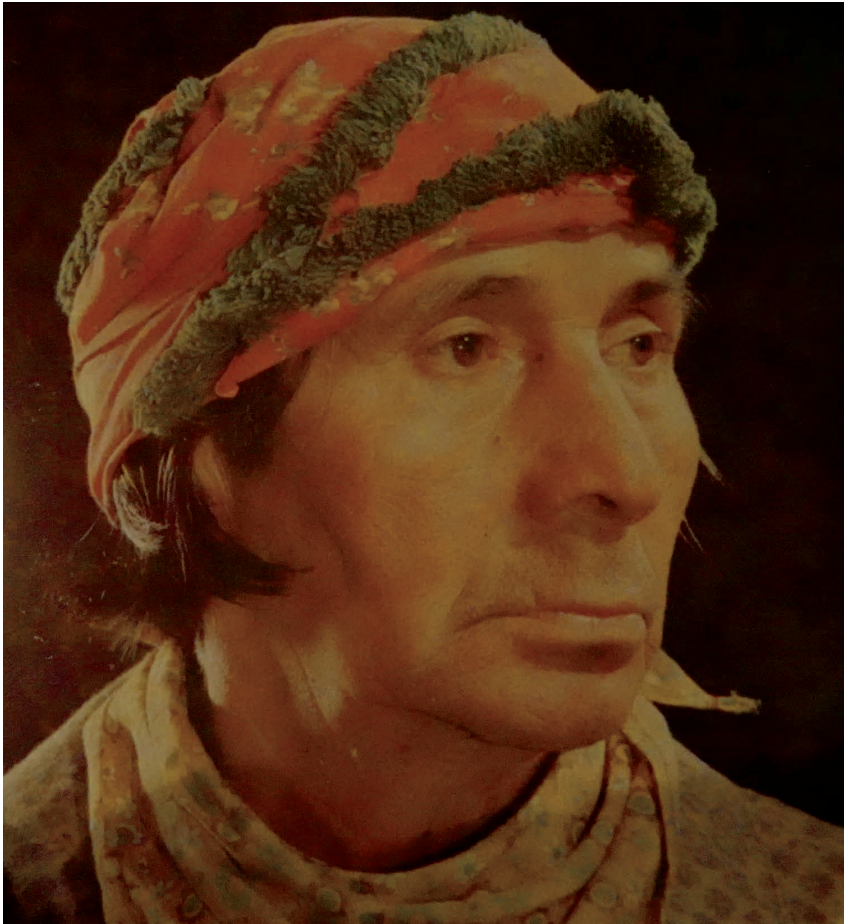


Photo Credit: Tennessee Historical Society –
Amonceta Sequoyah

sound asleep in the middle of the night
dreaming
suddenly my state of mind changes
I am wide awake but still experiencing the dream
I know my physical body is sleeping in the bed
and I know I am dreaming
yet I am still in the dream
my self-consciousness has shifted to my dream body
it's as if my whole self has suddenly been instilled in the dream
I am amazed and euphoric
I am by myself in an empty room of an unknown house
I hold on to the awareness
telling myself I am in a dream
I approach the door which is closed
and decide to try an experiment
I will see if I can go through the door
if it is a dream door
I should be able to simply pass through it without opening it
I extend my hand and am surprised
when my fingers touch the door
it is solid and my hand won't go through it
so I open it and go down a short flight of steps
and out through the front door
in the yard I have a great view over a rolling countryside
so I decide to try another experiment
I want to fly and with this thought I float up off the ground
and begin to move through the air at a fast pace
still constantly reminding myself that I am in a dream
but then I begin to feel apprehensive
I am flying rapidly
I begin to fear that I might plummet to the ground
the fear passes quickly
I think I must try to find someone

the first person that comes to mind is Chogyam Trungpa
a Tibetan tulku who lives in Boulder
I call his name once twice
then I notice below me a small group of buildings
I land softly on the ground
in the middle of some crude stone huts
two young children are standing there
dressed in strange bright colored clothing
then I lose my self-awareness and slip back into deep sleep



Photo Credit: Bridgeman Images

I saw Gregory Corso in a vivid dream
we were hanging out on the streets of New York
outside a theater
trying to decide whether to go in
Gregory was nervous
he looked like he was itching from the inside out
and was moving around like he was on speed
he went running off talking to someone
I looked down and there was a wad of money
a big thick roll of twenty-dollar bills
I picked it up with amazement
then Gregory was back
I showed it to him
he immediately grabbed it
and went running down the streets
I was angry and hurt
and then smiled
and suddenly realized it was a dream
and the shock of the awareness woke me
in the early dawn of the Tennessee morning light
the next time I saw Gregory I told him about the dream
he grinned and said
“Hey motherfucker I don’t want to be in your dream.
What the hell are you trying to do?”
I was a bit taken back and then said,
“Hell Gregory, you’re the guy who took all the money
I want my money back!”



Photo Credit: JMW

sitting with some friends in Boulder Colorado
I say, Well Philip, what was your wildest hallucination?
he starts in immediately
my wildest most intense was my first
I had gotten some pure pharmaceutical Sandoz acid
I was at Stoneybrook in college
we were all curious about it
I had really wanted to take acid for a while
we took the acid and after about thirty minutes
I was reading a Playboy magazine
looking at an actress covered with paints
and the colors started to swirl around
then this flash hit me
I said to myself
I didn't take any drugs
I've come to the realization about stepping onto the next plane
I was looking at this blank wall
and colors started coming down from the top of the wall
I'm looking at all these colors and they explode in the center
and I see my mother giving birth to me
like legs and a vagina with this head coming out
and it was me
it was all encompassing around my vision
I immediately took off all my clothes
and started running around campus
my friends were chasing me
and trying to cover me up
that was my first trip
and I have to say that was the most incredible

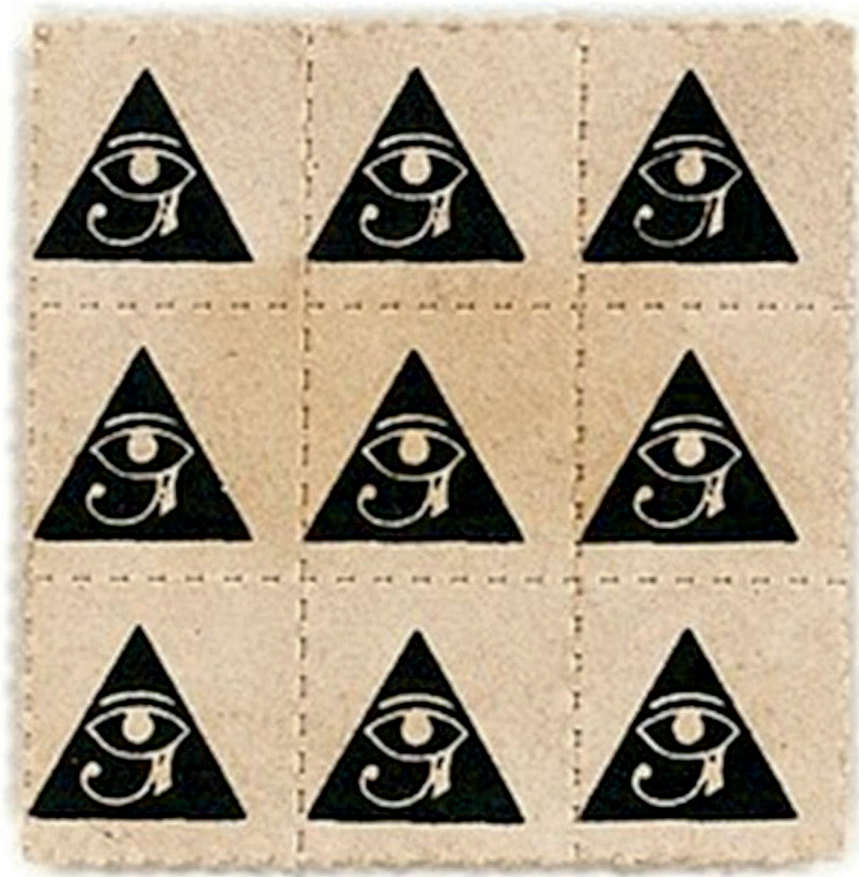


Photo Credit: Getty Images
Eye of Horus blotter LSD

sitting with Jan on the front porch
the kids laughing and playing around us
she is just back from a trip to California
and starts telling me about a workshop she attended
on shamanism
the teacher was an anthropologist
who told them to visualize an underworld journey
to go into a cave
and follow it to an opening out into a landscape
Jan described going into the cave
she came out on a ledge and went down to the valley
then a whirlwind appeared and it picked her up
and it laid her down in Bodh Gaya
at the temple where Buddha was enlightened
she walked through the temple and out the back
where she saw a dry riverbed
and a bunch of caves where Buddha meditated
she walked up to one of the caves and there is a big red dragon
that looks like a dinosaur
it had a long tail and lots of scales
big wings
but it seemed benevolent
so she climbed onto the dragon
and flew past the daylight into the darkness
and there were stars everywhere
all at once all the principles of relativity were clear
everything was relative to everything else
and just for that moment the universe felt complete
and then that awareness changed
and she found herself back in the temple in Bodh Gaya
and she could hear the drumming
and when she focused on the drumming
she was back in her body at the event in the darkened auditorium



Photo Credit: Shutterstock
Bodhi Tree Bodhagaya

Charles Bukowski and I were walking down a big city block
in the dreamscape of a rundown skid row section of town
we find a bar and go in to have a glass of wine
the next thing I notice Bukowski is gone
I look around the bar
it is a desolation bar with a bunch of old white guys
sitting by themselves
staring sullenly into their beers
I go out on the street to look for Bukowski
I see him on the sidewalk lying in a shallow cardboard box
I have a camera on a strap around my neck
I remove the lens cap and put my eye to the viewfinder
when I look through the lens I see Bukowski as a young boy
lying in the box
I move the camera down and look directly at him
it is still him lying there sleeping
so I move the camera back up to try again
this time I see him as a very old man in a fancy suit
with a dress hat
as I watch he tips his hat and smiles at me
I take the camera down and look again
it is still Bukowski sleeping in the box
so I raise the camera again
this time I see him as an infant wearing a diaper
I can't believe this is happening
I put the lens cap back on the camera
and give up trying to take his picture
he is still lying there in his beat-up looking clothes
then he wakes up and is back on his feet
we take off down the street
on the next block we pass a bookstore selling his latest book
then we end up in another bar looking for more wine
we stand at the counter waiting to order

there is a bowl of arrowheads sitting beside the cash register
I pick one up and show it to Bukowski
we get up and walk out
as we walk along the street we pass a window with a sign that reads
Hand Jobs \$5 Love \$10
with two naked women standing behind the window

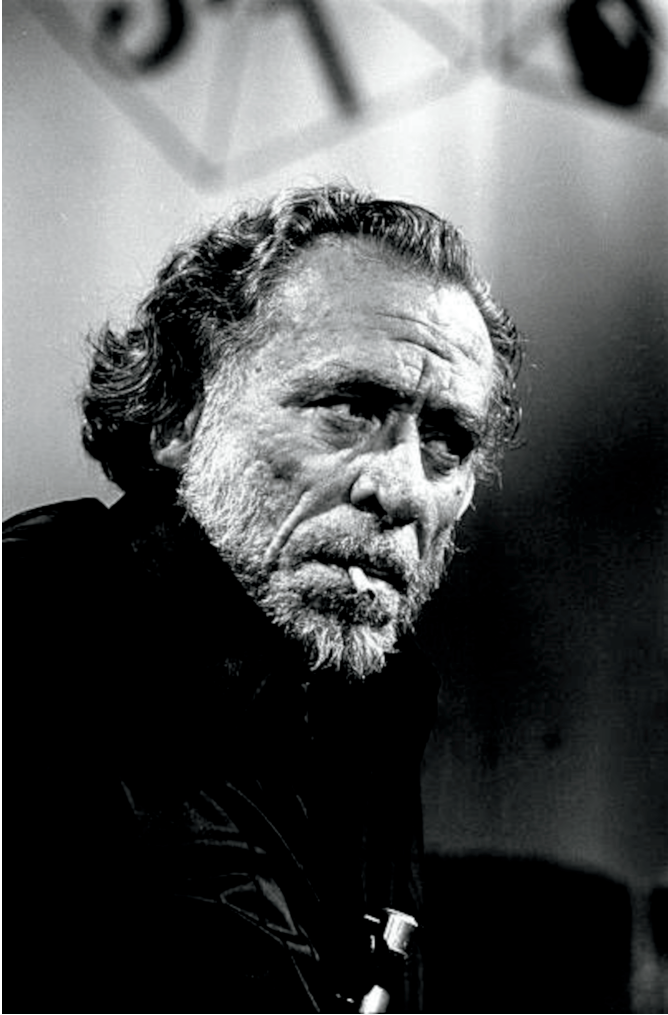


Photo Credit: Getty Images

it was a magical week at Naropa
Ken Kesey was there
along with Ginsberg and Burroughs and Corso
at one point they had press interviews with the authors
so I went to Kesey's interview and sat in
there were a few people there from the local press
but after a few minutes they ran out of questions
as they left I worked my way to the front
Kesey had a strange little cloth bag shaped like a fish with him
"What's ya got in the bag, Ken?" I inquired
he reached in and pulled out a deck of cards
"Watch this" he said
and shuffled the cards and had me pick one
then he found a wooden toothpick in his bag
and asked if anyone had a wedding ring
someone produced a simple gold band
and he seemed ready
I was sitting in front of him not three feet away
he holds the card from the deck between his thumb and first finger
and lays the toothpick across it
then he passes his hand over the card and bends it
so it bows down
and when he does the toothpick appears to be floating in the air
he has the wedding band in his other hand
and he passes the toothpick through the wedding band
as he does so the vibratory rate of the room seems to change
it is like the air is alive and tingling
to prove it was magic
when he released the pressure on the card
it assumed its flat shape with the toothpick laying on it
I looked at him smiled and said "Not bad Ken"



Photo Credit: JMW
Ken Kesey's shoes.

for a brief period I was acting director of a small nonprofit
that provided services for Native Americans in Tennessee
one day I got a call from a prison Chaplin
asking if we could provide services for Native American prisoners
I arranged a visit to the largest state prison
where they had about a dozen Indian inmates
I asked a Navajo man who worked in the office to come with me
since he had trained in the pipe ceremony with the Sioux
the prison officials were very suspicious about the whole thing
and carefully examined the pipe and our tobacco bag
searched us from head to toe and let us in
we met with about a dozen men in an outdoor area
that had a small tree growing in the center of the courtyard
we sat on the ground under the tree
most of the men were more white than Indian
but that was to be expected
Ray had an eagle bone whistle
he stood up and raised his head to the sky and let out three shrill blasts
then he started explaining the pipe ceremony
and told the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman
and how tobacco smoke could carry your prayers to the upper world
as he was talking birds were flying in and landing in the tree
in just a few minutes the tree was full of birds
the tree limbs were all moving and were alive with activity
Ray loaded the pipe and offered it to the six directions
then said a prayer
remembering all those in the “iron houses” and hospitals
and passed the pipe around the circle
when it came back to him he stood up
offered the pipe to the six directions one more time
then he raised both arms to the sky and said, “That’s it”
when he said those words all the birds in the tree took off
by this time there were hundreds of birds gathered in the tree
and it made a big commotion when they all took off at once



Photo Credit: JMW

Crooker and I are on a long interstate drive
I ask him to tell me about his best acid trip
he said, I had done about twelve hundred mics
little tiny yellow microdots
I dropped it after work and drove out to the lake
as I was sitting there on the dock
I got the feeling I was becoming one with the dock
there were lines literally everywhere in the air
all connecting everything
and all moving
then it was getting dark so I went up to Jane and Ernie's house
Jane was sitting cross legged on the bed
when I looked at her
there was a sphinx head superimposed on her face
so I asked Ernie if he was seeing what I saw
and he asked me if I knew the riddle of the Sphinx
it was obvious they wanted to get it on
she was naked
she looked like Cleopatra with a headdress
so I took the hint and went on
that was the beginning of the trip
it got really wild after that
it was dark just the starlight no moon
I walked through the woods toward the lake
there were big mushrooms jumping out of the ground
I was in another level of consciousness
something mythological was going on
like a slash through time
I made it to the dock and sat looking at the stars
they started drooping then raining down
one of them came down and sat in my lap
I felt expanded and that I had a hold on myself
I peaked for a long time
the next day at work I signed out for the library
and slept there all day



Photo Credit: Jayson Levy,
JMW and Bob Crooker, NYC c. 1981

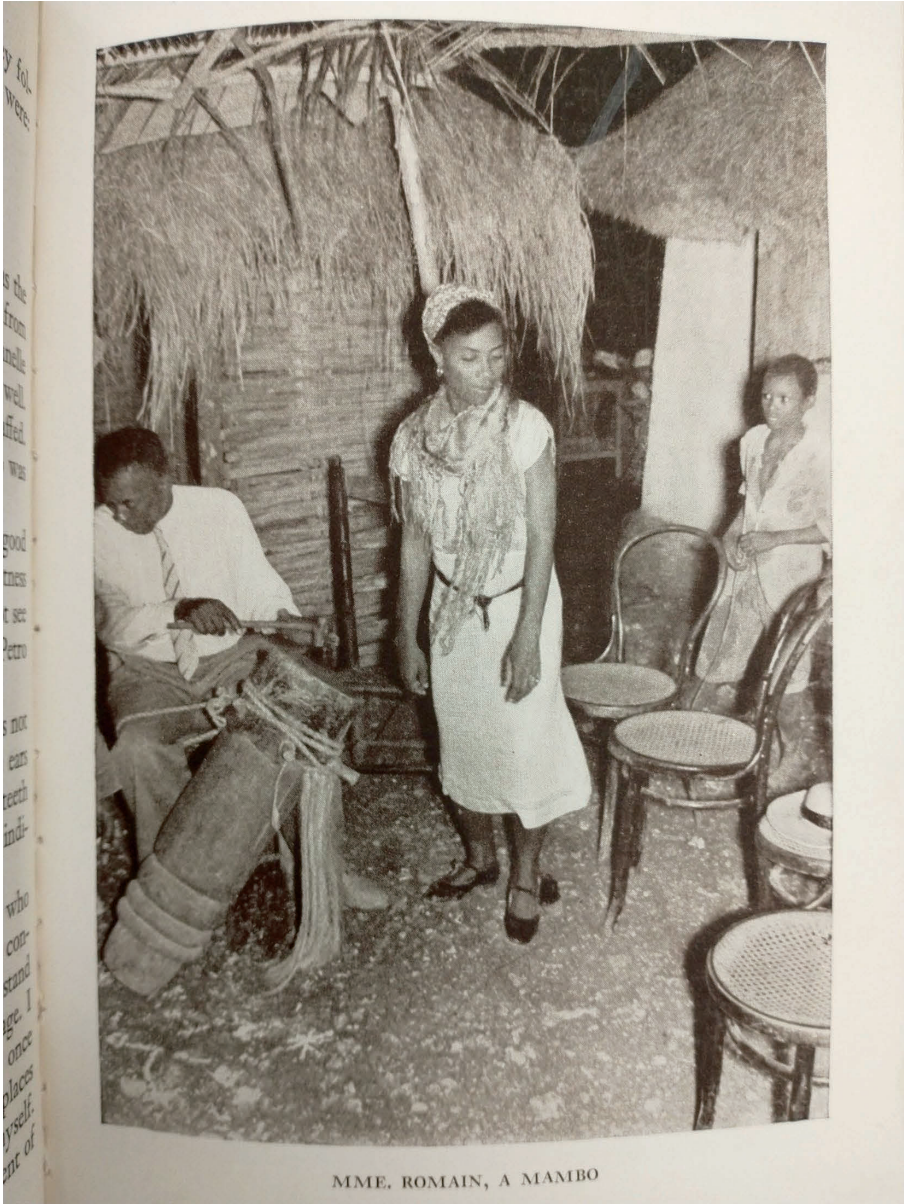
sitting around the front room of Thomas Merton's cabin
at the Abbey of Gethsemani in rural Kentucky
I ask my friend Andrew if he has ever had a visionary experience
he describes a period in his life when he was drinking heavily
and started having blackouts
where he was still interacting with people
but was totally unaware of what he was doing
it was taking a heavy toll on his marriage
and he was separated from his wife
he was at a party and was drinking heavily
and had a blackout
when he woke up he was in bed making love to a different woman
he was shocked at himself and dismayed
he went back to his rented apartment
where he had a shrine
honoring all the religions he admired
he had a wall hanging with Bacchus
and statues of Jesus and Buddha
he looked at the picture of Bacchus
and said, "You're fired"
then he looked at the shrine
and he heard Jesus speak to him
saying, "I love you, I always have"
he didn't hear spoken words
but knew Jesus had spoken to him
Andy went on to become a recovering alcoholic
and a Protestant preacher for a small rural congregation
until his tolerance for disaffected racial and sexual minorities
got him fired by his homophobic racist congregation



Photo Credit: JMW

Andrew “Sunfrog” Smith, Ron Whitehead, Brother Paul Quenon working on the poetry book titled *Not Knowing* inside Thomas Merton’s cabin at the Abbey of Gethsemani, KY.

Zora Neale Hurston wrote anthropological reports
documenting Haitian voodoo as the religion of creation and life
telling how it worshipped the sun and the water
and all the natural forces
she said the standard greeting in voodoo
was a handclasp that signifies the vulva
the female aspect of deity
encircling the penis
the male deity
Zora attended a ceremony
where the Mambo
the richly dressed female priestess
enacted the most sacred of rituals
drums began to sound
and the priestess began to dance
as she danced she removed a series of six veils
and fell naked to the ground
and revealed her sex organs
it was considered the highest honor for all the males
to kiss her organ of creation
where they come in intimate contact
with the mysterious source of life



MME. ROMAIN, A MAMBO

Photo Credit: Getty Images
Photo of a Mambo in Haiti

my friend Travis toured Europe as a folk dancer
on one of her tours she got to visit Findhorn
and stayed in the Findhorn community with one of her friends
she arrived tired after a long day of travel
her friends had a small house near a stand of trees by the beach
they had a guest room with a bed on the floor
and when she laid down and closed her eyes
suddenly the darkness was alive
there were plants growing all around her bed
they were glowing and vibrant with life
she opened her eyes and the room looked as it had
but when she closed her eyes the plants were still growing
they branched and grew multicolored leaves
and then flowered into beautiful iridescent flowers
she was exhausted and eventually drifted off to sleep
the next morning when she told her friends of her experiences
they said the house was positioned on top of a ley line
that ran right beneath her bedroom



Photo Credit: Courtesy of Travis Jarrell
Travis Dancing at Bukhara, Turkey

in the early 1970s the Kentucky poet Ron Whitehead
heard that the local community of Beaver Dam
was holding a rocking chair marathon
with a \$500 prize for the person who could rock the longest
five hundred dollars was a lot of money in rural Kentucky in those days
when the day arrived 144 people showed up with their rocking chairs
and lined up under an awning at the local strip mall
the local business community put up the money
and the whole town showed up to cheer on the contestants
they had recruited a cadre of over thirty judges
at 9 AM Saturday morning the local mayor read the rules
everyone got a five-minute bathroom break every three hours
otherwise they had to be in their chairs and rocking
anyone who stopped rocking for any reason was out
each contestant could have two visitors at a time
who could bring them food and water
but no one was allowed to touch the people or the chairs
they rocked all day and it was a long night staying awake and moving
but come Sunday morning there were still over 70 people rocking
Ron knew about the doors of perception
he was going to see what sleep deprivation did to his awareness
on the second night things started getting really wild
the local hospital had to send an ambulance to rescue some people
in the dark of the night people were sharing their most intimate secrets
when the sun came up there were still over thirty people in the running
Beaver Dam was Ron's hometown
and all his family were coming in pairs bringing him food and drink
when night fell again it seemed the end must be near
Ron began to hallucinate as he rocked
there he was hurtling along a narrow country road
in an old beat-up pick-up truck with a buddy of his at the wheel
going well over 100 miles per hour
when they saw a one lane bridge ahead
and a car rapidly approaching from the other side
they both hit the bridge at the same time
and somehow in the middle of the bridge they breezed by each other
as the two cars passed Ron looked over at the other driver
and saw him looking back grinning from ear to ear

Ron went over eighty hours without sleep
and came in second giving up the prize to a woman
who he felt needed it more than he did

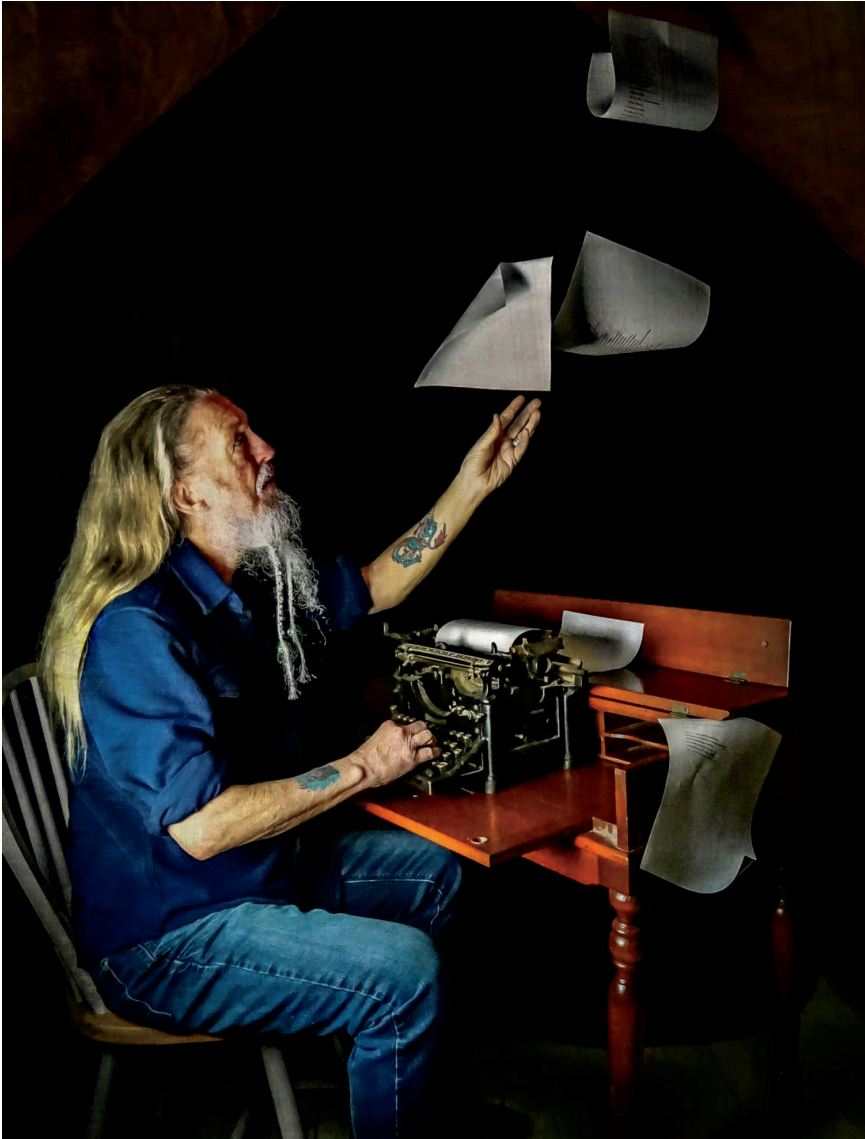


Photo Credit: Jinn Bug

CHAPTER 2

VISIONS OF PERU



Photo Credit: Reuben Orellano
JMW and Susan McDonald at the Pachamama Stone at Machu Picchu

Shaman with a cell phone – part 1

Machu Picchu is one of the most spectacularly beautiful sites on earth
it was an ancient Inca ceremonial center
perched on top of a narrow ridge
surrounded by snowcapped mountains
on our last trip to Peru
we were fortunate enough to get Ruben Orellana to go there with us
we had met Ruben the year before
and had gone to a ceremony that he arranged
with some elders from the highlands
it was a traditional ritual offering to the mountain gods
so that when we visited Machu Picchu
it would be with the proper consecration
Ruben is a Ph. D. archaeologist
born and raised in Cuzco
he had been the head archaeologist at Machu Picchu for three years
and discovered over forty outlying sites in the surrounding terrain
and was an expert in the religious practices of the Inca tradition
what I didn't know until this trip
was that he is also a practicing shaman
and started as a shaman's apprentice as a young man
we met him at Ollantaytambo
and rode the train to Aguas Calientes
where we took the first bus up the mountain to Machu Picchu
he took us into his old office
and showed us beautiful arial photos
and read to us from old Spanish documents
then we headed up the path around a mountain ledge
and suddenly came into view of Machu Picchu
it is a stunning sight of awesome beauty
the main part of the city had a large stone wall protecting it
we came up to the wall and stopped at the city gate
and as we were ready to enter the city
I looked up into the clear blue noon day sky
and saw a complete rainbow around the sun
I had never seen anything like it
and pointed it out

we all gazed at it in amazement
I put my hand on Ruben's shoulder,
and said "Good work Ruben"



Photo Credit: JMW

Shaman with a cell phone-part 2

once inside the city walls
Ruben took us across the plaza
through a complex of buildings
into a large room where there are two stone cylinders
carved out of the bedrock of the floor
they are about four inches tall and fifteen inches wide
with a lip about a quarter inch tall around the top edge
they were full of rainwater when we first came upon them
Bingham (the first archaeologist to excavate Machu Picchu)
thought they were mortars
where the women ground the corn
and took a famous picture of a young boy
holding a pestle in one of them
but Ruben pointed out that mortars were hollowed out
in a concave manner
and these have perfectly flat bottoms
he said these were used as reflective mirrors for watching the sky
he said the room never had a roof
that it was an observatory
and by comparing the images in the two cylinders
the ancient astronomers made calculations
charting the movement of the stars, planets, sun and moon
then he instructed us to stand in such a way
that we could see the sun reflected in the shallow pool of water
I shifted around until I had the gleaming light of the sun
reflected in the center of the pool
as I stared at the reflection
I noticed there was also a perfect circle of smaller suns
reflected over and over around the outer lip
in a radiant parhelion of gem-like points of light
reflected a hundred-fold around the outer edge of the pool of water
after a moment of concentration Ruben told us to close our eyes
as I closed my eyes
my visual field filled with a deep bright red color
then he asked us what colors we were seeing
and we each reported a different color

he said that in the Andean traditions there is a color spectrum
that runs through the body
such that each part of the body is associated with a color
and the ancients could diagnose illness
based on the colors you saw when you closed your eyes
and he asked us questions and diagnosed us
it was a marvelous room
with an esoteric technology
uniting the above and the below
reflecting outward to the distant cosmos
and inward to the inner state of the body



Photo Credit: JMW

Shaman with a cell phone-part 3

the second day at Machu Picchu
Ruben took us to an enclosed plaza at the far end of the city
where the Pachamama stone stands
it is a magnificent slab of stone over fifteen feet tall
the most striking example of the many mirror stones
that are found all around Machu Picchu
they are special stones erected by the Inca in such a way
that they stand out against the horizon
reproducing in silhouette
the outline of the mountain peaks in the distance
echoing an eidetic contour of the distant horizon
they served as shrines to the mountain gods
the mountain gods are called Apus
and the stones are Apu stones
the mountains were considered living beings
and the echo stones were a part of their worship
there were three of us there that day
my wife Susan and I and her brother
Ruben had us stand across the plaza about thirty feet from the stone
and told us to focus on the top edge of the stone
I looked at it and traced the outline with my eyes
concentrated my attention
and watched as Ruben went over to the stone
and at one end where it slopes down to meet the ground
he rubbed his hand along the top edge
and said "Look here, look here"
as he said that a blue line appear along the top of the stone
like a deep blue light
then I squinted my eyes
and the blue light ran the entire length of the stone
it was a beautiful deep blue
not the blue of the sky
but a more psychedelic neon blue
like an aura radiating from the stone
Susan and I were both going "Wow, look at that!"
Susan's brother was saying, "What is it, what is it?"

Rueben was grinning from ear to ear
it was a rare visionary moment
produced by nothing more than a shaman saying,
“Look here, look here”



Photo Credit: JMW

CHAPTER 3

VISIONS OF TIBET



Photo Credit: JMW

Stupa carved out of a giant boulder just outside Samye Monastery to mark the spot where Padmasambhava met the King of Tibet

in 1958 Palden Sherab was studying at Riwoche Monastery in Tibet
when the Chinese invasion reached their area
the monastery was taken over by Chinese officials
they heard tales of other monasteries that had been destroyed
with the monks either killed or forced into exile
that night he dreamed he was in the monastery courtyard
and it was full of tents
someone told him the Karmapa had come for a visit
and they led him to the Karmapa's tent
he found the Karmapa sitting in a chair
wearing his famous black hat and brocade robes
he presented the Karmapa with a khata and they touched foreheads
he felt very excited but knew it was a dream
he sat on the floor in front of the Karmapa
who was chanting with his mala
when the Karmapa finished chanting
Palden asked him if he should try to escape the invasion
Karmapa gave him the mala and told him to ask Dudjom
as he said this Dudjom appeared in the seat
Palden did more prostrations and presented another khata
then asked him the question
Dudjom chanted with the mala
and then answered
Yes, make your escape now and go through Pema Ko
and you will be safe
Palden knew he had the answer to his question
and dissolved the dream back into the original state



Photo Credit: JMW



Photo Credit: JMW

Trulshik Rinpoche was the abbot of the Rongphu monastery
on the slopes of Mount Everest
he wanted to receive a certain empowerment
given only by the 16th Karmapa
each time he tried to meet the Karmapa
something interfered
he did rites and rituals to dispel obstacles
but the Karmapa passed away
before he received the empowerment
then one night
while he was sleeping
the Karmapa appeared in his dream
and with total mindful clarity
bestowed the complete empowerment
he asked the Karmapa
Is this real?
the Karmapa answered
There is no difference
between the reality of this dream
and the dream of everyday reality
both are real
 both are unreal
in the absolute
 everything is empty
in the relative
 everything is real



Photo Credit: Oldmanisold – Photo is cropped.

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Rong Phu Monastery, the highest monastery in the world situated at the base of Chomolungma (Mt. Everest)

I asked my wife Susan if she would like to contribute a story
she told about a time when she and I and her brother
were visiting Tibet
we were anxious to see the Buddhist monasteries and ancient sites
even under the constant repressive surveillance of the Chinese
she had to take altitude medication
since we were coming from almost sea level
and would end up at over 17,000 feet
near the base of Mt. Everest
or Chomolungma as the Tibetan call it
“Goddess Mother of the World”
all the other stops culminated in reaching this goal
she described how as we climbed toward the mountain
she felt the onset of altitude sickness
by the time we reached our hostel near base camp
the pain from the headache was throbbing and almost blinding
she felt like she could be in real trouble
and knew there was no medical help anywhere around
she thought there were worse places to die
since we were at the base of one of the most sacred mountains
in the world
Rongphu is the highest monastery in the world
it sits at 16,340 feet
just below Everest base camp
right across the street from our hostel
we were anxious to see the monastery
and she mustered as much energy as she could
and we walked from the hostel across the road to the monastery
as we entered the main temple it was full of monks
seated on their cushions
one of them drumming on huge temple drums
we sat on nearby cushions
she closed her eyes
and started deep breathing
giving herself over to the vibrations of the drumming
she felt herself entering
the sound of the mantras they were chanting
she felt light and calm as that energy surrounded her

it was as if she was leaving the physical space of her body
and becoming part of the atmosphere in the temple
and felt a peaceful healing quietness and release
as if all the negativity was drawn from her body
as the music ended she felt centered
but very weak
as if she had just awakened
and when she walked outside
looking up at Chomolungma in the distance
she had no headache and no more symptoms of altitude sickness



Photo Credit: JMW
Chomolungma (Mt. Everest)

there was a famous Tibetan Buddhist Master
named Dilgo Khyentse
he was one of the most prominent teachers who went into exile
and was well known to the American and European students
who migrated to northern India to study with the Tibetans
once when he was visiting some of his family in Tibet
it was the custom when a famous master visited
to have them bless the most precious objects in the household
one of the men in the family was a hunter
and he had a rifle that was his most precious possession
so he brought it to Dilgo Khyentse to have him bless it
Khyentse held the rifle in his hands
turned it around and blew into the barrel
and gave it back
after that the gun would never fire again
the next time Dilgo Khyentse came to visit the family
the man hid all his guns



Photo Credit: Courtesy of Samye Monastery

there is a genre of visionary literature in Tibet known as terma
these were small slips of yellow paper
with only a few syllables written on them
in what they called dakini language
the person who discovered a terma was called a tertön
and they could look at those few syllables
and transcribe a complete text
there are thousands of these texts
and they form a part of the canon of Tibetan literature
Namkhai Norbu was a famous tertön who came to the West
his uncle Chokyi Wangchug was also a tertön
who lived in a cave high in the mountains
they built a wall across the front of his cave and installed a door
to protect him from the weather
when Namkhai Norbu was a child
he would go visit his uncle and stay in a cave just below his uncle
one night when he was visiting as he was sleeping in his cave
a dakini appeared in a dream
and gave him a small scroll of paper
the dakini explained that it was an important text
and that upon waking he should give it to his uncle
even as a child Namkhai Norbu was an experienced practitioner
and could maintain his consciousness in the dream state
so he knew he was dreaming and closed his fist around the scroll
and then closed the other hand tightly around the first
when he awoke at dawn his fists were still tightly clenched
he opened his hands and was excited to see a small scroll
in the palm of his hand
he immediately rushed to his uncle's cave and knocked on the door
normally this would have been forbidden
as it was not polite to interrupt the master during his meditation
but he came to the door and very calmly took the text
and said, "Thank you, I was expecting this"
and went back to this practice as if nothing special had happened



Example of a terma text written in dakini script from
<https://dakinitranslations.com/2021/05/12/dakini-script-khandro-da-yig-mysterious-symbolic-key-to-hidden-treasures/>

in 1968 Keith Dowman and his girlfriend Marilyn
were hitchhiking in Dharamsala
when a jeep pulled over and offered them a ride
they climbed in the back seat
and were shocked to see Richard Alpert riding shotgun in the front
he and his friend David Padwa were touring India
they took Keith and Marilyn to a Tibetan restaurant
and bonded over a three-hour meal
and invited them to come see the Dalai Lama with them the next morning
they all showed up at the compound and were greeted by the Dalai Lama
Richard Alpert told the Dalai Lama about LSD and offered him a sample
they heard later the Dalai Lama gave it to one of his monks
who reported it was powerful English medicine
after the meeting Alpert told Keith about the Amarnath cave
where there was an ice lingam six feet tall in a chamber deep in the cave
and gave him a sample of Sandoz LSD
Keith and Marilyn made a pilgrimage to the cave
it was a four-day trek through the mountains
when they came to the entrance to the cave they took the LSD
and joined a continuous line of pilgrims chanting “Om Nama Shivaya”
the air was thick with incense and the floor was covered with flower petals
as they approached the lingam they joined in the chants
the inner chamber was filled with a wild spirit of devotional frenzy
Keith and Marilyn stayed in the cave for over an hour
they found a small side chamber steeped in silence
broken only by the hum of the mantras echoing off the walls
the cave walls lost their solidity
there was a vibratory sense that made the rocks feel alive
they felt the consolation of the continuum of all life
the life force of the cave the same as the life force of their bodies
its silent solace concentrated here where countless pilgrims come
to experience the numinous wonder of the earth
then their eyes met and they knew it was time to leave
when they came out they were standing in front of a flower covered hillside
and they felt at one with the dizzying revelation of the mystery of being



Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Keith Dowman archive

CHAPTER 4
VISIONS OF THE YUCATAN



Photo Credit: JMW

the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico
is the cradle of an ancient civilization
with its capital city at Chichen Itza
at the center of the city is the great pyramid
aligned to the cardinal directions
with a big ramp with stone steps on each of the four faces
it lay in ruins for hundreds of years
until it was cleared and restored as a tourist attraction
that draws thousands to come and climb its steps
in the 1960s it was a magnet for the counterculture
and on one fateful day on June 21st
a young hippie was visiting the site
and he had just eaten some psychedelic mushrooms
and was sitting on the ground admiring the pyramid
he notice how at the base of one of the ramps
there was a serpent's head
on each side of the steps
then he saw there was an unusual shaped shadow
on the side of one of the ramps leading to the temple at the top
the shadow was formed by the sun hitting the side of the building
which is built in layers each one on top of the next
as he sat in bemused amazement watching the shadow
it formed a zigzag shape like a snake's body
on the side of the ramp
then as he watched in astonishment and wonder
the shadow started undulating
and then slid down the edge of the ramp
until it was subsumed in the head of the snake
he had some friends with him
and pointed it out as it was happening
as the story goes they were the first to notice this phenomenon
that happens every year to mark the exact moment of the
summer solstice
now thousands of people come there each year
to watch this amazing light show



Photo Credit: Exequiel Labiano

I visited the great pyramid at Chichen Itza one summer
at that time we were allowed to climb the steps of the pyramid
and visit the temple at the top
where every stone in the temple
is covered with life-sized engravings
of priests and kings in full regalia
it was blazing hot that summer
with the temperature well over one hundred degrees
I circumambulated the pyramid
admiring the great ramps on all four sides
then I noticed there was a door at the base of one of the ramps
and while I was standing there a young man
in a uniform stepped out of the door
and was smoking a cigarette
I had heard that this pyramid was built on top of
a smaller identical pyramid
so I asked the young man if I could go in and see it
he said that tours were limited
and you could only go in at certain times
I thought this over and reached into my wallet
and pulled out twenty pesos
I said that unfortunately my time was limited
and this was my only opportunity
and proffered him the twenty pesos
he looked at the money and said, "Oh senior, please go ahead"
and opened the door
I stepped through it and found myself in an enclosed space
with a very steep set of stone steps leading up
with barely enough room to stand up so I started up the steps
it was like being in a sauna
and there was sweat pouring out of every pore in my body
the steps were damp and I had to revert to the jaguar crawl
leaning over with my hands on the steps ahead of me
and slowly made my way up the narrow steps
it was incredibly hot in there and my heart started pounding
my head was spinning and I thought I might die right there
but I thought this would be a good place to die
and slowly made my way up the steps

I could feel the blood coursing in my veins
I gradually made my way to the top of the steps
and there was the temple under the temple
in the pyramid under the pyramid
I couldn't believe I was there
it was dreamlike and I was in an altered state
as startling as any psychedelic
there was a wire fence across the door to the temple
I looked through it and saw a large throne made of red stone
ornamented with other precious stones
the whole thing in the shape of a jaguar's body
I had a camera slung around my neck
and when I pulled up the camera
I heard a voice say "No pictures, senior"
I jumped and looked over to see a guard in a small side chamber
he was right beside me so I pulled out another twenty pesos note
and said, "Oh senior, this is my only opportunity
and I would appreciate having a picture"
and handed him the money and took this amazing photo



Photo Credit: JMW

CHAPTER 5
VISIONS OF ZUNI



Photo Credit: A Mudhead mask from the Smithsonian Institution

there are nineteen living pueblos in the deserts
of the American Southwest
they have survived almost five centuries of constant assault
and through it all they have maintained their homeland
their language
and their history
along with their unique culture of festivals and dances
it is a tiny remnant of what was there before the Spanish invasion
but it has survived with their culture more intact
than almost any of the other North American tribes
to visit the pueblos during their festivals
is a visionary experience
to see the Kachinas come to town at Zuni
is to experience a mytho-poetic dreamworld
jarringly distinct from modern American commercialism
being in the plaza of the pueblos during the dances
is an experience of another time and another place
and a culture so distinct from all else in America
that it is intoxicating and mind-altering



Photo Credit: JMW
The main dance plaza at Zuni Pueblo

Zuni has an annual calendar of Kachina dances
 the most spectacular is the Shalako in the winter
 and the All-Kachina dances in April
 but there are numerous other occasions
 when the gods come to town
 I have attended several of these all-night events
 when hundreds of Kachinas dance in the plazas and kivas
 these ancient events are unlike anything in America
 the dances are an echo of the primordial past
 when music
 theater
 poetry
 song
 dance
 history
 myth
 and religion

were all acted out in the same ceremonial event
 each Kachina is the embodiment of a supernatural force of nature
 the most famous are the mudheads who are the clowns of the Zuni
 and the Shalako who are ten feet tall
 each winter special houses are designated
 an elaborate shrine is put up at one end of the room
 another is hung from the ceiling
 a choir of elders is seated along with an orchestra of drums and flutes
 the room is decorated with multiple deer and buffalo heads
 which are wearing exquisite turquoise jewelry
 there is a hillside just outside Zuni where the Kachinas gather
 and make their way into town accompanied by singers and drummers
 when they arrive the people line the streets
 and sprinkle corn meal and pollen in front of the procession
 and shower it down on the Kachinas as they pass
 when they get to the house that is hosting the dance
 there are hundreds of people in the house and around the yard
 when the gods enter the house
 the excitement level goes through the roof
 they are accompanied by the unworldly sound of bullroarers
 with drums and flutes and chanting from the elders
 it is a wild cacophony electric with energy
 there are two ten-foot tall Shalako dancers

with bird-like beaks that clatter when they move
the mudheads are with them
along with the Little Fire God and many other Kachinas
I am in the back of the room
one of the few non-native people in the house
the room feels alive with the movement of the dancers
the chants of the elders echo off the walls
the energy of the gods fills the room
with a palpable sense of the supernatural
there is a time when the dancers all sit together
and one of the elders tells the story of the great migration
and how the Kachinas first came
the dances go on until first light
when they retire to the kivas for the final ceremonies
the dances are a portal into a visionary mytho-poetic time and space
still alive at Zuni



Photo Credit: JMW
From a mural at Zuni Pueblo, NM

at Zuni
the sun
 the moon
 the stars
 the plants
 the animals
 and humans

are in a great web of life
where those things that have the most mystery
are the most powerful
and closest to the supernatural
the animals
having instincts not present in humans
are higher forms of life
the forces of nature
are even more mysterious
and consequently higher than the animals
humans
having to rely on reason
are the lowest form of life
the forces of nature
are superior in wonder and power
existing before the animals
as the ever-recurring immortal causes and conditions
for all other forms of life
the Zuni call them
silent surpassing ones



Photo Credit: JMW

CHAPTER 6

VISIONS OF TAOS



Photo Credit: JMW

The north side of Taos Pueblo, Taos pueblo is known as the “Place of Red Willows”. I had visited on several occasions and always noted the abundance of willow trees growing on the sides of the creek but they were always bright green with their foliage. When I visited in the winter suddenly I understood the name, when the willows lose their leaves in the fall the branches are a beautiful shade of bright red that fires up in the late afternoon sun.

the two multi-storied adobe buildings inside the walls
of the Taos pueblo
look today much like they did when the Spanish
first arrived in the 1500s
these two buildings are the only ancient adobe buildings
that have survived into modern times
and are still a vibrant village
which serves as a time capsule preserving a bit of ancient culture
there is no electricity or indoor plumbing
in the old adobe buildings
they get their water from a beautiful stream
that comes from a sacred lake
high in the mountain that overshadows the pueblo
and flows between the two ancient buildings
the age of the buildings is unknown
since they don't allow archaeologists to dig in the pueblo
they have maintained much of the old ways
and still have an annual calendar of dances
that are enacted much as they have been for hundreds of years
there are six kivas in the village
and they are the heart of the religious life of the community
where they hold lengthy initiations for the young men
and maintain a rigorous schedule of ceremonies
that involve elaborate preparation
and all-night prayers in their native Tiwa



Photo Credit: JMW
South side of the Taos pueblo

my friend Bernadette is a native from the Taos pueblo
when her son AJ got deep into alcohol
it was destroying his liver
and he ended up in the hospital in Albuquerque
hooked up to all kinds of machines
looking bloated and very sick
Bernadette prayed to every god she could think of
one of her friends told her to get a peyote man
so she found a medicine man and asked him to come pray for AJ
the medicine man came to the hospital
and went right up to AJ and asked,
“Why are you here?”
AJ said “I didn’t listen to my mother”
the peyote man prayed for two hours in Navajo
he had peyote medicines in different bottles
he gave AJ peyote concentrated in a powder
he wet it with saliva and rolled it into a ball
and told AJ to take it
then there was more praying
he gave Bernie some teas to continue giving to him
he told her to get a cabbage and pound the leaves
and tie that across the upper part of his stomach
so she made a poultice of cabbage leaves
and laid it over his stomach
he started throwing up and had diarrhea
everything came out
and the cabbage fell onto the floor
an African nurse came in and said,
“We do that in our country too”
the next day he started feeling better
they discharged him from the hospital three days later
none of the doctors could believe it



Photo Credit: Lenny Foster
Bernadette Track in the courtyard of the Mabel Dodge Luhan House

the Taos natives say that if you drink the water
coming from Blue Lake
you will turn into a deer
stepping through the walls of the Taos pueblo on a feast day
is like going through a time portal
that puts you in touch with the ancient world
it is a miracle that it has survived the ravages of time
through all the violence and oppression that Spanish
then Mexican
and then American
colonialism has inflicted on the pueblo culture
these dances resonate with a deep relationship with nature
a return to the source
to the creation time
when humans lived in harmony with their environment
the Deer Dance is a mystery play
with echoes in the deep past
it touches into the mysterious numinous quality of life
where there is a special relationship with nature
based on reciprocal maintenance
not on exploitation or domination
their legends tell us that in ancient times the deer could talk
and the deer taught the humans the Deer Dance
to empower humans to hunt them
the dance was the way the deer gave permission
to take them for food
and use their skins for clothing
as long as they honored the deer with the dance



Photo Credit: JMW
From a mural in Taos

at Taos pueblo
the animals are considered more powerful than humans
who must rely on them for food
and for guidance in spiritual matters
the dances honor the animals
and are a form of ancient theater
enacting the myths that hold the people together
putting on the mask of the animals is a transubstantiation
where the masked dancer has the spiritual power of the animal
and when the animals come to the village
it is a cause for celebration
the dancers see the world through the eyes of the animals
and dance to honor them
and to beseech them to help in all things
the ancient world is still alive in these dances
the animals live the mysteries in ways that we never can
confined as we are by reason and thought
the animals know what to do
while we humans have to try to figure it out
when the dancers put on the mask
they dance mysteries that can't be spoken
where the forces of nature are made visible in a drama
that is deep in the common experience of the pueblo
they hunt the animals to provide food
and each death must be propitiated
there has to be a sacrifice by the people
who take the flesh of the animals as their food
the dances are a spiritual release of this burden
it is obeisance to the wild untamed archaic forces
represented by the animals
the dance is an attempt to repay the debt and honor their sacrifice
there can be no killing that can go unanswered
the dance is the expression of the wonder and the mystery
of the sacrifices involved in all life
for visitors the dance is a form of entertainment
for the pueblo people it is a form of prayer
that brings them into a relationship with the forces of life
outside their own private self

and establishes a relationship to the great chain of being
the dance harkens back to the time when we were all indigenous
before all these things got separated
now religion takes place in a church or temple
history is learned in a school classroom
and myths are hardly a part of our life at all
the pueblo dances are a dramatic enactment of their way of life
and their archaic heritage
carried down to us in ways that we lost many generations ago



Photo Credit: Edwin Curtis
Buffalo dancers from Tesuque pueblo

on January 6th
at about one o'clock in the afternoon
we heard the sound of a drum along with whooping in the plaza
and everyone rushed out to greet the dancers
who are coming in a procession across the plaza
as many as fifty women and fourteen men
along with a choir of six or eight singers and a drummer
the women form two lines facing each other
with the male dancers between the two rows
they are joined by a group of Koshares
the sacred clowns
dressed in loin cloths and moccasins
with black and white stripes around their torsos
and up and down their arms and legs
their faces painted black
with a bizarre headdress made of corn husks
shredded into strands that stick out on both sides of their heads
the Koshares separate into two groups
running in circles around the other dancers
the Koshares all howling and carrying on the whole time
the plaza is filled with the sounds of drumming and chanting
the dancers are moving in syncopated choreographed dance steps
then another procession appears coming across the plaza
led by two women dressed in white buckskin
with colorful ribbons streaming down their backs
and a headdress of tall brightly colored parrot feathers
these are the Deer Mothers
they are followed by a big herd of deer dancers
each dancer has an antlered deer head over their head
the deer skin draped down their back
with the forearms tied to their arms
they walk with two staffs they carry like canes
that act as the front legs of the deer
they walk slightly stooped like a four-legged
the deer have spruce twigs in their mouths
there are some elk as well with magnificent horns
and six buffalo dancers with buffalo heads
as they approach the dance ground they bunch up

with the deer coming first
then the elk and the buffalo
there is a young boy dressed in mountain lion skin
the men and women dancers from the earlier dance
form a big circle
with an opening like a gate
the drummer and choir are just outside the circle on one side
the Koshares come to the opening
whooping and herding the deer into the circle of dancers
it is a chaotic scene
the Koshares making weird loud grunts and calls
there are a couple of eagles in the midst of the dancers
they have an eagle head over their head
and eagle wings over their arms
then the beat changes
and the choir does a pulsing droning undulating chant
with the pitch alternating high and low to the drumbeat
all the Koshares have tiny wooden bows
with arrows made of straw
as the herd sways to the beat of the drum
the Koshares shoot one of the deer with their little straw arrows
and one of them rushes in and throws it over his shoulder
and runs with it to the gate of the circle
where two men dressed in white buckskin
with quivers full of arrows and a big bow
form a barrier
to stop the Koshares from carrying off the deer
sometimes one of the Koshares breaks through the circle
with a deer over its shoulder and heads back to the kiva
then the drama continues and they repeat it several times
sometimes they escape
sometimes they are forced to release the deer
and let it return to the herd
one Koshare heaves the mountain lion up on the back of the deer
as if it were jumping on the deer's back
another Koshare feeds bits of raw meat to the dancers
after a few more rounds of chanting and drumming
the Koshares bunch up around the Deer Mothers

the two women remain perfectly unperturbed
while the Koshares wave their arms up and down and howl
growling and creating a cacophony of bizarre sounds
as if they are taunting the women who continue dancing
the drum is still going and the singers still singing
the women continue doing their moves
with their arms held up the whole time
it is a wild scene
then the dancers move down the racetrack the animals first
followed by the village dancers who wander off in all directions
then the Koshares bunch up looking at one another
grunting and waving their arms
finally the Koshares leave the dance yard
and go by the bridge over the shallow stream
and make their way down to the creek
where they break through the ice and jump in the water
throwing the ice-cold water all over their chests and faces
howling the whole time



Photo Credit: JMW

Painting of a Koshare from a mural at the Mabel Dodge Luhan House, Taos, NM.

Front and back cover photos credit JMW

Inside front cover photo credit JMW of a portrait of Longchenpa
by Lama Gyurme Rabgyes

